

Born is the King! A Royal and Repulsive Bloodline

Matthew 1:1-18

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Rogue One: A Star Wars Story comes out in a few weeks. I'm excited. It goes back into the story of the first *Star Wars* which we have discovered is actually the fourth *Star Wars*. So you have an old story which itself has a backstory filled with characters that in a few weeks when *Rogue One* comes out, we will discover have their own backstories. *Star Wars* is its own universe, its own narrative, and its own ancient history that spins and spirals and somehow comes together.

Take Luke Skywalker. Who was his father? Anakin Skywalker. Now Anakin has a whole history that involved prophecy about one who would be uniquely born. Last years' *The Force Awakens* created a huge uproar with a new character named Rey. The movie ended with her handing a light saber to Luke Skywalker who hasn't been in the story since 1983. There's huge Internet speculation about IF she actually is Luke's daughter and there are conspiracy theories about whose child she might be. After all, the most famous line in all of *Star Wars* is, "I am your Father."¹

Don't tell me we modern types are not interested in bloodlines and family identities. It just has to be about someone really important, like Luke Skywalker, a make-believe character in a make-believe universe created in Hollywood, the land of make-believe.

How curious would you be about let's say, a real person, a truly important person...who lived in our own world...of whom ancient prophecies whispered...world events strangely fulfilled those prophecies...and a royal bloodline was preserved mysteriously for a couple thousand years? Let's add that if the bloodline was established to be true, he is the King of all kings who will rule the universe forever and before whom you will bow personally someday and acknowledge his Lordship. Anyone interested now?

I will tell you who was interested. The Jewish world of the first century. Jesus of Nazareth had exploded onto the scene with teaching and miracles. The religious leaders had conspired to kill him with political trickery rivaling any in our modern day. But there were claims of resurrection by his disciples. They were preaching everywhere that Jesus was the Messiah promised long ago. How could this be? Who was Jesus? Where was he from? Was he a son of David? A son of Judah? A son of Abraham? To be the Messiah, he had to be all those.

Matthew begins his gospel big. He gets Jesus' pedigree out there first as a true son of Abraham and his rightful claim to the throne of King David.

The Summary Genealogy (Matthew 1:1)

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."
(Matthew 1:1 ESV)

¹ *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back*. Dir. Irvin Kirshner. Perf. David Prowse and Mark Hamill. Lucasfilm. 1980. Film.

Mark and Luke begin with John the Baptist; John begins with theology; Matthew begins with genealogy. We somewhat do this. The first question we often ask people is, *what's your name?* We all have a family name. We call it our last name. I am of this clan. This tribe. This family tree.

This was an early conversation I had with Jennifer. My family heritage is Dutch and it was something we were proud of and talked about growing up. I asked Jennifer, "What is Terrell (her maiden name)? She said, *"I'm not sure."* Her family has so many strands that it wasn't a big deal. Then she moves to Northwest Indiana with all these wooden shoes and she's asked all the time. *"So what are you?"* In reality, we all have a genealogy. It's still important today but not nearly as important as the ancients. The Jews kept scrupulous notes on their family genealogies up to the destruction of the temple in 70 AD when the records were lost. In the ancient world, your genealogy was your identity.

Notice that Matthew doesn't beat around the bush. He puts his main point right in the first line, *"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ."* (1:1) He will explain in verse 21 that Jesus is a Savior. Indeed that is what Jesus' name means, *Savior*. Then he adds, *Christ. Jesus Christ*. Perhaps we've heard *Jesus* and *Christ* combined so much that the force the New Testament writers meant is lost on us. *Christ* was not his last name. *Christ* was a title. Like president or king or governor, *Christ* to the Jews was a title of huge importance. It means "anointed one." This is an Old Testament title and image as kings and prophets were anointed with actual oil to indicate that they were chosen for a task.

Isaiah prophesies: *"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."* (Isaiah 61:1) The Greek translates it *Christos*, or to us, *Christ. Jesus Christ. Savior Anointed One. Savior Messiah*.

Remember Matthew's whole purpose in his gospel is to present and persuade that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy and human longing. He is the one we've secretly hoped for. He fulfills the covenants. He fulfills the prophecies. He fulfills our hopes and dreams.

All this is tied to very royal and regal prophecies about the glory of the One who would come. This gets to the second part of this summary genealogy. He is Jesus. He is Christ. He is the son of David and the son of Abraham. Why these two? They are the two most prominent individuals God made covenantal promises with regarding the Messiah. Through them, through their lineage, would come the One.

Son of David

Who is the most famous king of Israel? Hands down, it's David. Not only was he great and powerful, God made a very special promise to David, known as the Davidic covenant.

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son." (2 Samuel 7:12-14)

He would sit on David's throne forever. How could a human reign forever? Even the great David died. How can someone be eternally so strong that his throne would last forever?

Son of Abraham

"I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:17–18)

The entire Jewish nation of Israel finds its common identity in and through Abraham. He is the physical father of Israel. Of course, the Messiah had to be a son of Abraham. He must be a Jew. What would this promised son, this offspring, do? *"All the nations of the earth be blessed."* How would an offspring of Abraham bless the whole world? It would require God's progression of revelation for the Abrahamic covenant's fullest implications to be discovered. It would take a manger in Bethlehem and a cross in Jerusalem.

So there is the summary. Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is a son of David. Jesus is a son of Abraham. That's quite a claim, but let's see the resume. What's the bloodline?

The Royal Genealogy (Matthew 1:2-16)

"Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king."
(Matthew 1:2–6)

Matthew is the most Jewish of all the gospels. Who do you start with? Abraham. You see the patriarchs there: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There are obscure names until you see Boaz and Ruth. Ruth is the second of four women listed. It's just three generations from Ruth to King David.

Notice the structure here. Abraham to David. The second section (verses 6-11) is from David to the deportation of Israel to Babylon in 586 BC. Let's read it.

"And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon." (Matthew 1:6–11)

This is a list of kings. If you are up on your kings of Israel, you will notice there are omissions. Are these the embarrassing ones? No. There is plenty of embarrassing in here. The word translated, *the father of*, or *beget* in some translations, can accurately be translated, *the ancestor of*. Matthew isn't mistaken; genealogies didn't require everyone be listed.

"...and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of

Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.” (Matthew 1:13–17)

The names are again obscure until you get to verse 16, "*Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.*" Did you catch the slight change? It doesn't say *Joseph, the father of Jesus*. It says "*Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born.*" *Whom* in the Greek is grammatically feminine. It cannot apply to Joseph. It has to apply to Mary.

Why wouldn't Matthew say, *Joseph the Father of Jesus*? He was, wasn't he? Yes, but not by bloodline. Here we have Matthew implicitly explaining the virgin birth. Joseph was Jesus' father, not by bloodline, but by adoption. He is a son of David by adoption. Some people make the case for Mary also being in the Davidic line, but it doesn't matter. Jesus was Joseph's legal son but Joseph wasn't Jesus' physical father.

Jesus was conceived not by the seed of man but by the power of God. It is important that he was the son of David and the son of Abraham, but most important is that he is the Son of God. The virgin birth fortresses that truth.

Matthew concludes with saying there were 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the deportation to Babylon, and 14 until Jesus was born. There has been a lot of ink spilled trying to explain why Matthew highlights 14. The most intriguing answer is that the three consonants in David's name, when seen as numerical numbers, add up to 14. At the very least, when numbers are consistent and not random, it means there was a plan. There was a planner. Jesus came in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4), at just the right time, and even his genealogy shows order, intentionality, and completeness.

The Repulsive Genealogy

What is most surprising about this genealogy is that Matthew does the opposite of what ancient genealogies tried to do. They glamorized the pedigree. Modern genealogies do the same. Hitler expunged certain aspects of his family tree to hide some Jewishness found there. People change their names if there is something unsavory in their family story. We want to highlight what makes us look good and hide what makes us look bad.²

Matthew does neither. He highlights Jesus' royal line but goes out of his way to highlight the distasteful and even repulsive parts of Jesus story. There are real skeletons in Jesus' closet. Let's just look at a few beginning with the four women listed. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba.

- *Tamar* – Tricked her father-in-law into pregnancy by pretending to be a prostitute.
- *Rahab* – a Gentile. A prostitute in Jericho.
- *Ruth* – A Moabite Gentile
- *Bathsheba* – A Hittite. The first son—the fruit of her adultery with King David died.

² Adapted from aspects of Tim Keller's sermon, "The History of Grace," December 14, 2008. Found online at <http://www.gospelinlife.com/the-history-of-grace-5997>.

Jesus, tell me about your family tree. *Well, there were three Gentiles. Three of my forefathers came from either prostitution or adultery. There were two prostitutes. One incestuous pregnancy.*

Well it must get better from there, right? Actually, no. Abraham was a liar. Isaac was a terrible father. Jacob was a coward and arguably a thief. Judah was immoral. Perez was the son of incestuous prostitution. We all know about David's sins. Ahaz was just plain evil. Manasseh was an idolater. Jeconiah was cursed by the prophet Jeremiah. Do you get the idea?

What's your family tree look like? My dad has been doing genealogy studies on our family and has uncovered shocking and lurid stories of sin, deception, abandonment, and assumed identities. My now deceased grandmother and grandfather apparently only pretended to be married but never actually were. How's your tree look?

Forget the past, how about the present? It's easy to condemn the branches of the tree before us but we are a branch too. What's your story like? Any unsavory chapters? Maybe you're living one right now? Maybe you are the chapter someday your kids will be embarrassed to tell. Maybe they already are.

So Matthew, why pull all these skeletons out of Jesus' closet? Why air the dirty laundry of the family? Why fill the genealogy with sex, adultery, deception, prostitution, conspiracy, and murder? Because the royal line shows us he is a King and the repulsive line shows he is a Savior. All of this is leading in just a few verses to the angelic declaration of why Jesus came: *"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21)

He didn't come from perfect people and he didn't come to save perfect people. He came from sinners to save sinners. Sinful people like we have in our family trees. Sinful people like us.

You might think, these people in Jesus' genealogy are lucky to be there. If there's a guarantee for going to heaven, it must be being personally listed in Jesus' genealogy. No. How were these people saved from their obvious sins? Even David and Abraham? The same way we are. By faith in God's promised Messiah. Which means, ***you aren't saved by being a father to Jesus but a follower of Jesus.*** From Abraham to Jacob to Boaz to David. These sinners listed here were saved by faith in Jesus.

In this we have a massive advantage over them. They only had promises of his coming. We are on the other side of the cross. We have the gospels. We have the New Testament. We have Jesus' life and ministry in detail. We are told what it means by apostles inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the explanation to us in Scripture. We have so much more. It's better to be us on this side of the cross than any person in Jesus' genealogy, provided we are followers of Jesus.

Are you? Does your sin keep you somehow from believing? Do you think you are unworthy or too sinful? I remember one of our Lake Michigan baptizees this summer said to me before the baptism, *"Keep me under the water just a little longer, I've been a really bad boy."* Jesus came for the bad boys, the bad girls. He came from the bad boys and he came for the bad boys. He came to save his people from their sins. Are you one of them?

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